

Testimony of Support for Community College Baccalaureate and Other Programs

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Good afternoon, my name is Anita-Maria Quillen and I am the President & CEO of Diversified Engineering & Plastics in Jackson County, an engineering and manufacturing company. I am majority owner of the company which is recognized as a woman & Hispanic owned business. The foundation of the business dates back to the 1970s and was instrumental in converting machined metal to plastic within an engine block. This conversion created not only cost savings but reduction in weight while upholding the same strength and durability. Today we continue to innovate and provide design support to our Clients. We employ over 130 employees and offer a full benefits package to all full-time employees. We strive to encourage, engage and educate our employees.

Since the financial turmoil in 2008, we have struggled to find qualified candidates and have spent countless hours and tens of thousands of dollars on recruiting skilled workers. Over the last few years I have become more involved in engaging open discussion on the shortcomings of our communities. As a young female business owner and committed resident of Jackson County, I continue to search for ways to grow our community and great state of Michigan.

House Bill 4148 not only provides the opportunity for communities to grow and support their residents, and those in the surrounding area, it identifies a right that all communities should have. The right to educate and provide the best foundation to residents. As our nation faces some of the most challenging times in over 100 years we as communities need to step back and look at what we can do to encourage, engage and educate, to support individuals to thrive. We hire many strong individuals that have an associates, few continue on to obtain a bachelors as there are not many public institutions that offer a 4 year degree in advanced manufacturing within a manageable commute of our facility and a

manageable cost. Now let me clarify, I am speaking in regards to the community in which I employ and the industry in which I own a business. We have done a great disservice by neglecting the individuals that enter into the work force right after high school by not having more resources that meets their educational needs and financial restrictions within Jackson County. Many of these individuals would like to seek a higher level of education, some at the request of their employer or others due to their own personal goals. These individuals work on average 45 hours a week, and many have personal obligations in addition to work which creates significant hurdles. In recent years we have had employees attend various training classes in management, robotics, manufacturing and leadership. These seminars have spanned from coast to coast and carry a heavy financial burden on the company for a single's day seminar plus travel. Providing this within our own community would remove a large hurdle for many that seek specialized education and training. This will allow employers to budget more financial support for tuition reimbursement or engage their staff in job specific training. It also promotes employers to team up with their community colleges to provide unique programs to cater to the employer's needs. This bill provides the educational resources needed by the largest employers within their own community. I cannot encourage you enough to allow communities to provide the best tools to their residents and local employers so that they may also encourage, engage and educate.

I am committed as a small business owner, female, wife and mother to encourage each and every individual to furthering their education. Education remains with us for our entire lives, our communities are our family and we need to strengthen families within our great state of Michigan so that our children can raise their children to continue on the legacy of what our nation was founded on.

I also ask you to question yourself as to why we as a State would not want communities to have the best tools available to encourage, why would we not want our community colleges to have the best tools to educate and support the local businesses greatest needs; recruiting and retaining the best talent. Our best assets are the employees in which we employ. We all know that our businesses are

successful due to their support staff, even elected officials are aware of their importance. We are nothing without those next to us, behind us, above us or below us. Why would we as employers not want our support staff to have the best educational resources at their fingertips? Why do we not want the best of the best, everywhere?

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today and I will continue to support our great state. I leave you with a thought by Nelson Mandela:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

This change starts at home, within our own communities. House Bill 4148 encourages, engages and educates.

Thank you